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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0727
INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 3580
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 0649
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1985

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000839

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA AND NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/07/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [PTER](#) [MA](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FIRST MEETING WITH MOROCCAN FM FASSI
FIHRI

REF: A. RABAT 0821
[1](#)B. THOME-JONES E-MAILS
[1](#)C. 08 OCT 2009

Classified By: Ambassador Samuel Kaplan for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: During their initial meeting, Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri offered the Ambassador Morocco's perspectives on nearly all our key bilateral and multilateral priorities. He focused most heavily on the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), emphasizing that King Mohammed VI firmly believes that "peace is possible" and that Morocco has a role to play in the process. He reiterated that the GOM has sought to understand the MEPP from the Israelis' perspective -- even if it does not agree -- and noted that "we can talk to the Israelis -- for us it's not taboo." That said, he said that the difficult issues surrounding Jerusalem are "extremely sensitive" for Mohammed VI, who is facing increasing criticism from some of his Arab allies -- and outright hostility domestically -- for his efforts to contribute positively to the MEPP. Fassi Fihri highlighted the joint U.S.-Moroccan efforts to counter terrorism and radicalization, expressing appreciation for our support for increased regional cooperation. The Ambassador and the Minister agreed on the need to maintain and reinforce our already strong bilateral relationship, and the Ambassador specifically thanked Morocco for its efforts to promote Middle East peace. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Ambassador presented copies of his letters of credence to Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri on October 7. A warm and expansive Fassi Fihri alluded to our long and productive bilateral relationship and emphasized the accelerated progress over past 16 years. "We need to maintain the momentum we built during the Clinton and Bush administrations," he said, hailing the recent exchange of letters between President Obama and King Mohammed VI as crucial to establishing a framework for moving forward. He noted that there are "small issues" that need resolving which include a tax dispute with the Rabat American School and confirming GOM authorizations for the construction of a new Chancery in Rabat and a new Consulate General in Casablanca. However, Fassi Fihri expressed confidence that these can be easily resolved and that our overall partnership on the major issues has been and should continue to be outstanding.

Morocco and Israel

[1](#)3. (C) Fassi Fihri detailed how Morocco views its role in facilitating the MEPP. Since the 1970s Morocco has been committed to seeing Israelis and Palestinians living as neighbors, but now Mohammed VI has become convinced that "a

real peace is possible," based ultimately on a two-state solution. Morocco has sought dialogue with the Israelis, in part to try to better understand Israel's points of view on the sensitive questions; even if they disagree, Fassi Fihri emphasized that too many Arab countries neglect the importance of at least understanding the Israelis' priorities and red lines. For example, he said, Mohammed VI is "extremely sensitive" about construction and other Netanyahu government policies in Jerusalem, given the King's role as the head of the regional Al Qods (Jerusalem) Committee; however, the King has tried to understand that Netanyahu was elected in part because of those hard stances on Jerusalem. As another example, Morocco continues, as a matter of policy, to insist that international law be respected with regard to the right of return for Palestinian refugees. However, Fassi Fihri acknowledged that it would be impossible for all refugees to return, adding that "here we are flexible and we understand Israel's concerns."

¶4. (C) Regarding U.S. efforts, Fassi Fihri praised President Obama's Cairo speech and said that while some Arab leaders interpreted the President's UNGA speech as a "retreat" from what he said in Cairo, the Moroccans do not share that interpretation. The Ambassador thanked Fassi Fihri for the positive role Morocco has played on the MEPP and on other issues, adding that in Washington Morocco is consistently singled out as a strong U.S. ally and willing and able partner. He also underscored President Obama's personal commitment to peace in the Middle East -- commitment the Ambassador deeply shared.

Counterterrorism, Trade, Military and W. Sahara

¶5. (C) On other issues, Fassi Fihri said the U.S. and Morocco have a shared commitment to fighting radicalism, terrorism and human and other trafficking. He praised U.S. support for a regional response to these threats in North Africa and the Sahel. On trade, the FM said the U.S. and Morocco need to continue strengthening our bilateral economic relation and hailed the Free Trade Agreement negotiations as a major component of this effort. Fassi Fihri also cited Morocco's major purchase of F-16 aircraft as a sign of our strong military-to-military relationship, musing that although the decision left France quite disappointed it was the right move for Morocco. Fassi Fihri also briefly mentioned the Western Sahara, calling in Morocco's most difficult and most important priority. However, he specifically postponed an in-depth discussion by saying, "But you will notice that I am not talking about it today."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: In welcoming the new Ambassador, Fassi Fihri was warm, open and sincere in his satisfaction with the current state of the bilateral relationship and its future.
END COMMENT.

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Kaplan